

STATEMENT
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMPENSATION AND EMPLOYEE BENEFITS
THE HONORABLE MARY ROSE OAKAR
CHAIRPERSON
COMMITTEE
ON
POST OFFICE AND CIVIL SERVICE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
NINETY-NINTH CONGRESS
ON
BENEFITS FOR AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL SPECIALISTS (STATION)
EMPLOYEES OF THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

BY
EDWARD J. MALO
AVIATION CONSULTANT

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Madam Chairperson and Members of this Subcommittee, I am pleased to be allowed to present my statement.

My name is Edward J. Malo and I reside in Burke, Virginia. For most of my adult life, I have been closely associated with aviation and served as a pilot in World War II. For some 29 of my 34 years of federal service, I was employed by the Federal Aviation Administration and its predecessor organization. My experience as a controller in all three options of air traffic control; namely tower, flight service station and air route traffic control center, has given me a good insight into the stresses of tower, station and center controllers.

After retiring from the FAA, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association employed me as the Director of the Air Traffic Control Department. One of my primary duties was to assist our members in their day-to-day dealings with flight service stations and the dedicated men and women who work in those facilities.

First of all, let me state that I completely agree with the statements and recommendations made by Mr. Henry. The specialists who are working in flight service stations deserve the same treatment as other controllers working in towers and centers. The job requirements of station personnel are just as stressful as those for other types of ATC facilities. Let me cite a few for your information.

In centers and towers, controllers can generally consult with other personnel to decide the best course of action to take as there is always additional personnel available. Just the opposite is true in flight service stations where, because of inadequate staffing and the work environment, station employees almost always make

judgments which affect safety of flight operations without consulting with other knowledgeable controllers.

The flight service stations generally deal with pilots who have less experience than pilots who are in contact with tower and center personnel. Therefore, they must exercise care and judgment in providing information to these pilots. Controllers in stations must ask themselves ---- Is this pilot fully knowledgeable about flying or is he just reluctant to ask for further details about his flight? Many such questions arise in the minds of station personnel. ---- Will the pilot be insulted if too many details are given about his flight?

Some pilots, unfortunately, are unwilling to admit that they have made a mistake and are most reluctant to ask for assistance. This is when the flight service station controller must determine the type of action to take. All of us in aviation have, at one time or another, heard a pilot call a flight service station and ask for a practice "DF" (direction finding) steer to an airport. This type of situation requires judgment on the part of the controller. Is the pilot just asking for practice OR is he truly lost and requires emergency assistance? Interestingly enough, statistics indicate that station personnel, on a percentage basis of assigned controllers, provide more flight assists annually than controllers in towers or centers.

It may seem that I am placing too much emphasis on the judgmental requirements of flight service station controllers. However, a review of the FAA instructions on providing flight services -- the so-called "station bible" -- shows a different story. Just broad general

guidelines are provided in this handbook. Personnel are told to exercise "their best judgment" in dealing with pilots. Such phrases as "brief by translating, interpreting and summarizing available data for the intended flight"; "emphasize conditions that are particularly significant such as low level wind shear, embedded thunderstorms, reported icing and airport closures"; and "VFR flight not recommended" can be found throughout this handbook.

Some people believe that the only duties of station controllers involve briefing general aviation pilots on weather conditions and filing a flight plan. It is true that these are their primary duties. However, these are just routine assignments. Other tasks of a non-routine nature are equally or more important and require a great amount of judgment. For instance, station personnel are involved in:

Emergency DF procedures and instrument approaches -

Aircraft making emergency landings with explosive cargoes aboard -

Aircraft bomb threats -

Law enforcement activities -

Lost or stolen airplanes -

Military flight exercises and training operations - and

Handling and forwarding messages concerning special air missions, including presidential flights.

Over the years that I've been involved in aviation, I have, as a controller, manager, user of the ATC system and representative of a general aviation association, seen the dedication of controllers working in flight service stations. This is not to say that controllers in towers and centers are not also dedicated and provide

an excellent service to those who fly or are dependent on aviation. Unfortunately, flight service stations are not glamorous. When resources are allocated to the ATC system, the flight service stations are the first to be cut. Equipment is outmoded. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised to see some of the teletypewriter equipment that I used to operate still in service today. There always appears to be a shortage of qualified controllers in the flight service option. Nevertheless, these dedicated people, under very trying circumstances, continue to perform their duties in an outstanding manner.

Many of us in aviation are convinced that, after the unfortunate job action of tower and center controllers in August 1981, station controllers, by remaining on the job, were greatly responsible for restoring the air transportation system in the United States to normal operation.

Over the past twenty or thirty years, the FAA has conducted numerous studies on the job stresses of tower and center controllers. May I suggest that flight service station controllers experience similar or greater stresses and frustrations.

There is an old saying among airline captains that 95% of their flying job consists of sheer boredom and 5% of sheer terror. I might paraphrase that and say that 95% of the time controllers in flight service stations are extremely overworked and 5% of the time they are experiencing sheer terror.

I wish to thank this Subcommittee for allowing me to express my views on air traffic control and flight service station controllers. I hope that you will see fit to grant station personnel the same job benefits afforded tower and center controllers.